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The Changing Character of War

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second Harry Truman administration. In this work, she soundly establishes that Eisenhower and Dulles did not view the communist world as a monolith. In contrast to many American observers, Eisenhower concluded that Mao's control of China was a permanent fact and that U.S. rollback of the Chinese communist revolution was unlikely. Like Truman before him, he disparaged Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek and his unrealistic hopes for reestablishing himself on the mainland. Eisenhower and Dulles believed that Mao could create his own path within international communism, following the independent path of Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito. In this view they anticipated the possibility of a Sino-Soviet split before it came to pass. They viewed U.S. economic sanctions against China as counterproductive, strengthening ties between the communist-bloc nations. Yet despite these assessments, Eisenhower continued on a course of confrontation with China, conducting covert operations and propaganda against China, tying Taiwan into a mutual-defense treaty, and enforcing economic sanctions against the mainland. Tucker thus faces the task of explaining an Eisenhower who “disparaged much of what passed for China policy under his own administration” yet never publicly expressed or substantially acted on his convictions.

Eisenhower and Dulles both saw U.S. interests in Asia as secondary to those in Europe. Both had strong personal ties to the European allies and to NATO and were convinced that Europe was America's enduring partner and the key arena for arresting communist expansion. Changing U.S.-China policy carried the probability of significant political cost. Because the Republican Party had made Truman’s "loss of China” a central issue in the 1952 campaign, moderating the U.S. approach would have required Eisenhower to challenge both his own party and the influential anticommunist “China lobby.” Political capital expended on China policy would come at the expense of essential support for European efforts—a cost Eisenhower was not willing to pay.

In the end, the fact that Eisenhower and Dulles had a less hard-line view of U.S. relations with China than is commonly assessed becomes a case study in the use and limitation of presidential power. The subtleties of Eisenhower's view of Asia pointed to constraints on his action, real and perceived, and made the cost of a potential change in U.S. policy more than Eisenhower was willing to bear. As Tucker concludes, in the end Eisenhower did not get the China policy he wanted, but he did get the China policy he made.

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Academic strategists have been agonizing over whether war is changing its character or is being changed by any manner of influences, ranging from technology to “war amongst the people,” since the fall of the Soviet Union. The tragedy of September 11th added impetus to this inquiry. The Oxford Leverhulme Changing Character of War program, which ran from 2003 to 2009, has been to date the most
comprehensive attempt to answer the question. The essays in this work are the participants' considered responses to it.

The standout contribution among several extraordinarily useful chapters is Hew Strachan's on strategy in the twenty-first century. Strachan is a historian who, while aware of his discipline's fondness for the particular and aversion to the general, is concerned to rescue the study of strategy from political scientists who tend to use historical examples to justify sometimes-sweeping theoretical constructs. Historians may be tempted to dismiss everything as having passed this way before, which can sometimes cause failure to recognize genuine change and innovation. Political scientists, however, too often are oblivious to the peculiarities of their chosen examples and can be tempted to see novelty where none exists. Ironically, both are seeking stability in the service of predictability—the historian, admittedly, with the skeptic's reluctance. Strachan therefore asks, What can guide us? His answer, not unexpectedly, is war itself, provided we maintain a steady focus on the distinction between its nature and its character.

But to what changes in war's character can the contributors point? They begin by defining what war is, in terms of characteristics: fighting; reciprocity; scale; public, not private; aims beyond the fighting itself. It is easy to agree that within these five pillars war is changing, but exactly how is harder to pin down and often amounts to a question of degree.

The historians point to war as a collective act engaged in by politically, nationally, and ethnically defined communities. The “philosophers” point to war's individualization. In the “just-war tradition,” killing is legitimized as part of a collective action, but under humanitarian law, which now claims greater and increasing authority, killing is a moral responsibility to act against inhumane behavior. Consequently, the “what” and “what for” of law represent a major change, one in which differences become apparent when the U.S. interpretation of law as the tool of states is contrasted with that of those who increasingly view law as the crystallization of absolute and internationally agreed norms.

This difference obviously affects attitudes toward not only the suppression of terrorism but even the issue of who is a terrorist, as well as the question of who is, and who is not, a noncombatant. Osama bin Laden placed the citizens of all Western nations in his sights on the basis that democratic mandates empower governments and do not simply hold them to account. Yet is this substantially different from Giulio Douhet and the other advocates of strategic bombing who argued that civilians should be bombed to provoke them into rising up against their governments?

The success of nuclear deterrence ironically reinforced this trend toward opaqueness. By making major war effectively impossible between 1945 and 1990, it opened the door to terrorism and the rise of nonstate actors, and it led states to channel their use of violence into limited wars. Such wars can be robust—think of Russia's invasion of Georgia and U.S. action in Iraq. But limitation and the diversification of players have also sparked talk of a spectrum of conflict, a concept that erodes the distinction between war and peace by viewing peace not merely as the absence of war but as
something requiring the provision of justice, good government, and all that is necessary to secure human security.

It will come as little surprise that the majority of essays in this estimable and thought-provoking volume display little sympathy for such “new wars” views. Change has occurred, but the new wars/old wars argument is between strawmen who do not exist, or if they did, who survived only for a time and need to be examined in historical context. "The wars waged at the start of the twenty-first century were still predominantly the products of national, religious and ethnic identity; their aims remained governance and state formation. Paradoxically, however, they have been seen as wars of a new variety, principally because we have mistaken the character of individual wars for war's normative nature." "New wars" often turn out to be “old wars” coming back to fool us all over again.

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Among horses, Potomac fever is a potentially fatal gastrointestinal disease, but in the world of American governmental officials it has an entirely different meaning—although it too can be a fatal disease. In this case, J. William Middendorf II refers to the impetus that led him to leave a successful career as an investment banker on Wall Street for Washington, D.C., to become treasurer of the Republican Party, 1964–68; then ambassador to the Netherlands, 1969–73; Under Secretary and then Secretary of the Navy, 1973–77; permanent representative to the Organization of American States, 1981–85; U.S. representative to the European Union, 1985–87; and finally the chairman of the White House Task Force on Project Economic Justice, 1985–87. In addition, Middendorf has been a board member of the Heritage Foundation and of the Defense Forum Foundation, as well as playing continuing key roles as an active supporter of the Navy League, the Naval Order of the United States, and many other naval-related activities.

The history of the U.S. Navy's civilian administration and its political dimension is a relatively overlooked subject when compared to its operational history. Moreover, it is rare that a Secretary of the Navy writes his memoirs, but when he does they provide invaluable information, insight, and perspective. Only a very few of Middendorf’s predecessors have published their memoirs, generally figures who served during key periods, such as John D. Long of the William McKinley administration and John Lehman of the Ronald Reagan administration. Middendorf’s service as both under secretary and secretary linked the last year of Richard Nixon's administration with the entire Gerald Ford administration and provides valuable insights from that period.

The published works of the two Chiefs of Naval Operations who served under Middendorf—Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, who served his final months under him and published his memoir On Watch (1976), and Admiral James L. Holloway III, who published his memoir under the title Aircraft Carriers at War (2007)—are significantly complemented by this book, which